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AIRMAN FIRST – CAN FITNESS PLAY A PART?

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Preface

Fitness has always been an integral part of my lifestyle and as a Services Officer, it is also a primary mission within my career field. The role that fitness plays however, has been undervalued in the Air Force culture and for that reason, I have undertaken this research project.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my research advisor Lt Col Jeff Hukill. His positive attitude and insight have been a great help. I would also like to acknowledge Maj Gary Dzubilo (HQ USAF/ILV), Maj Neal Baumgartner (USAFSAM/FEP), Lt Col Bruce Weaver (AFMOA/SGOP), Maj Lisa Schmidt (AFMOA/SGZP), and Ms Tammy DeCoux (AFSVA/SVPAF) for their review and comments. Finally, I would like to thank the dedicated staff at the AU Library for their research assistance.

Abstract

Department of Defense Directive 1308.1 defines the DoD's policy on physical fitness. The directive mandates that each military service establish physical fitness requirements and training specific to their service mission and culture.¹ As the most technical of all the services, Air Force fitness programs have similarly followed suit. The Air Force's reliance on technology however, has also been touted as the cause for many of the problems plaguing the Air Force culture today. The author proposes that changes to Air Force fitness programs may help foster an "Airman First" mentality and counter some of the cultural problems within today's Air Force.

Notes

¹ Department of Defense Directive 1308.1. *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Program*, July 1995, 4.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Fitness is not a destination but a journey.

—Nash

Physical fitness has historically been viewed as an integral part of the culture of the nation's armed forces. Fitness programs help build a fit force, they foster esprit de corps, and enhance teambuilding, all of which result in increased combat effectiveness. Unlike other military services such as the USMC however, the Air Force has not embraced fitness as part of its culture. With its individualized emphasis and its technically oriented fitness test, AF fitness programs may have a lower propensity of promoting teambuilding and unit cohesion within the rank and file than other services do.

This lack of teambuilding and unit cohesion are contributing factors for cultural problems such as careerism and stovepiping which are inherent within the AF today. Both problems stem from emphasis on the individual versus the team and appear to be more evident within the AF than within any of the other services.

Assuming that fitness is a core foundation for all members serving in the profession of arms, can the AF build on this fitness foundation and incorporate a fitness mindset into the culture to help promote ongoing efforts to build an airman-first mentality? An airman-first mentality focuses on being an airman first before being a fighter pilot, space operator, etc. It emphasizes the team over the individual and emphasizes the Air Force over one's own career.

To incorporate fitness into the AF culture, it is important to first understand culture as it pertains to institutions and organizations. Chapter 2 of this research project will thus provide a generalized explanation of organizational culture and a more in-depth look at the Air Force culture including its origins and context. This chapter will also highlight specific cultural problems affecting the Air Force and how these problems stem, in part, from emphasis on the individual versus the team and from emphasis on technology. Additionally, recent Air Force initiatives designed to counter these problems will be addressed.

Chapter 3 will examine the benefits of fitness and will relate how fitness programs can help build unit and team cohesion. Chapter 4 will further explore fitness in the military by looking at the history of the AF's fitness programs and then comparing the fitness programs of the other services. Chapter 5 will look at possible ways in which fitness can help in developing an "Airman First" mentality to alleviate some of the current cultural problems in today's Air Force. Finally, Chapter 6 is a brief conclusion summarizing the research.

Chapter 2

What is Culture?

The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.

—Edgar H Schein

On a societal level, Webster defines culture as “the concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, and institutions of a given people in a given period.”¹ At the organizational level, David Drenner, author of *Transforming Company Culture*, defines culture simply as “how things get done around here.”² The culture of the Armed Forces is distinct from all other institutions, is rich and colorful, and is steeped in tradition. Throughout history, each of the service branches within the Armed Forces have derived their own unique culture in support of the DoD’s common goal of fighting and winning our nation’s wars. Indicative of the different service cultures are today’s military recruiting campaigns such as the Army’s “An Army of One,” the Navy’s “Let the Journey Begin,” the Marine Corps’ “The Few, the Proud, the Marines,” and the Air Force’s “No One Comes Close.” Similarly indicative of the different service cultures are service-specific cultural problems and service-specific fitness programs. This chapter will discuss the Air Force culture, i.e., how the AF culture arrived at its current state and how our current cultural problems have grown from seeds planted in the past.

The Air Force Culture

At the organizational level, military culture has been recorded as far back in history as the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C. The U.S. military culture (USN, USA, USMC) on the other hand, did not originate until the Revolutionary War. But it was not until the post-Civil War years when the most significant developments to the culture were imbedded. “The very isolation and rejection which reduced the size of the services and hampered technological advances made these same years the most fertile, creative, and formative to the history of the armed forces.”³ As a result, the military culture that evolved was a counterculture to society...disciplined, rigid, anti-individualistic and corporate in nature.⁴

Similarly, the AF culture that evolved with the advent of airpower, was also a counterculture to military society of the day. Strategic bombardment theory, waging war from the third dimension, and emphasis on technology were all contrary to Army, Navy, and USMC strategy. Billy Mitchell, one of the Air Force’s early founders describes the AF culture in his quote:

The air-going people have a spirit, language, and customs of their own. These are just as different from those on the ground as those seamen are from land men. In fact, they are much more so because our sea-going and land-going communities have been with us from the inception of time and everybody knows something about them, whereas the air-going people form such a new class that only those engaged in its actual development and the younger generation appreciate what it means.⁵

Even today, 50-plus years after its inception, the Air Force culture remains unique and distinct from all the other services. Could this uniqueness be in part, responsible for our unique cultural problems?

Cultural Problems Within Today’s AF

Two of these cultural problems plaguing the AF today are Stovepiping and careerism.

Stovepiping

During a Heritage Foundation lecture on “The Air Force Turns 50, Is It Ready for the Future, Lt General Bradley C. Hosmer defined stovepiping as part of the growing problem of retention within the AF. “Having a core purpose that is simple but not simplistic would provide a focus for the loyalty of Air Force warriors: a focus on loyalty to the service instead of loyalty to individual trade crafts and specialty skills like tankers or special operations...it’s the stovepipe problem within the Air Force.”⁶

Carl Builder, author of the Icarus Syndrome, states that this problem has been prevalent throughout AF history. Initial stovepipes were generated out of loyalty to bombers and SAC; then to fighters and TAC. The advent of missile technology and then space technology created further stovepipes while support versus operations stovepipes continued to exist throughout.⁷

Builder summarizes the current Air Force culture in his quote:

Once the concept of airpower no longer served as the altar for common purpose by aviators and groundlings alike, the unifying sense of mission, purpose, and cause within the institution began to evaporate. People found themselves in an institution because that was the place to do what they wanted to do – to fly airplanes, to work on rockets, to develop missiles, to learn an interesting or promising trade, etc. The institution fractured; and a hundred mischiefs were turned loose to bedevil the Air Force.⁸

Careerism

Along a similar vein, careerism among the officer ranks has also grown. The problem plagued AF leadership, including former Chief of Staff General Fogelman, who viewed young officers as lacking in their understanding of core values, core competencies, the role of aerospace power and teamwork as a result of their preoccupation with their careers. “Ask any Marine Corps member what he or she is and the response will resound loud and clear – I am a Marine;

present the same question to an Air Force member and the typical response will be, “I’m a pilot, space operations officer, etc.”⁹

A 1991 study of former ACSC students by Carl Builder found similar results. Students were more interested in their next assignment than in the institution or military education. Builder saw firsthand “the careerism, stovepiping, and the loss of professionalism at arms” prevalent in the AF today.¹⁰

Similar to careerism is a trend toward occupationalism within the ranks. In a cultural study entitled “Institutional and Occupational Trends in the Armed Forces,” Charles Moskos highlights the differences between institutional and occupational organizations as a baseline for his thesis.¹¹ He states that institutional organizations transcend individual self-interest in favor of the higher good. They are legitimated in terms of values and norms that apply to its members 24 hours a day, within and outside of the workplace. The United States Military has traditionally fallen into the institutional organization category.

Members of occupational organizations on the other hand, are tied into job-specific roles and are not governed outside of the workplace by the organization’s values and norms. Occupational organizations are legitimated in terms of the market place. A Fortune 500 company would likely fall into this category.¹²

Moskos thesis contends that the military, particularly the Air Force, is moving away from the traditional institutional organization to a more occupational organization.

Because of their extensive use of technology, the air force and the air force officer corps tends to be the most susceptible to increasing specialization and a diffused sense of purpose...they face the greatest pressures for occupationalism and serve as a harbinger of things to come for other branches as they become increasingly dependent upon technology.¹³

Rated operators and core elite operators (special operations) are the most at risk for occupationalism; senior ranking, more service-educated, and joint-experienced officers tend to

be more institutional-oriented.¹⁴ In an organization whose core values espouse “service before self,” this move toward occupationalism is a dangerous one.

Cultural Initiatives

Stovepiping and careerism problems were key agenda issues during the 1996 Corona Conference. To combat the problems, AF leadership initiated two new programs: the Airman Basic Course and the Developing Aerospace Leaders Program.

Aerospace Basic Course

After studying the careerism and stovepiping problems at length, AF leadership determined that a “training program similar to the Marine Corps Basic Course to indoctrinate new officers with the culture of the Air Force”¹⁵ was needed.

In response to the Corona tasking, the first Aerospace Basic Course (ABC) was launched in July 1998. The mission of the new course is:

To inspire new USAF officers to comprehend their roles as airmen; one who understands and lives by the USAF core values, articulates and demonstrates USAF core competencies, and who dedicates oneself as a warrior in the world’s most respected aerospace force.¹⁶

With heavy emphasis on “airman” as the basic element of the force, ABC provides young officers with the big picture Air Force first before going off to learn their individual specialties. “These are young guys who have no technical specialty yet, no concept of stovepiping,”¹⁷ says Colonel Eisen, previous commander of the ABC course.

Developing Aerospace Leaders Program

The Developing Aerospace Leaders (DAL) Program is another initiative aimed at improving the Air Force’s culture via professional development programs. The goal of the program is to “advance initiatives necessary to better mold Air Force leaders of tomorrow.”¹⁸ Since many of

the Air Force's personnel policies and practices are rooted in the Cold War, "now is the logical time to take a look at our people and what we are doing in terms of force development. The DAL Program is ensuring we have the right training and experiences in place for future Air Force leaders"¹⁹ says Colonel Rich Hassan of the Air Force general officer matters office. The intent of the program is to create effective mid-career generalists by using a "broad mix of base-level assignments, professional military education, training, exercises, secondary and tertiary specialties, deployments, and staff tours."²⁰ Both the ABC and DAL Programs are steps in the right direction to bring the profession of arms back into focus for the USAF.

In summary, from its inception, AF culture has often been viewed as a counterculture to the other services. Our fitness programs have similarly followed along these counterculture philosophy lines. Both reflect a culture based on the individual versus the team with a heavy reliance on technology. It is this emphasis that has led, in part, to the AF's current cultural problems and to the development of programs such as ABC and DAL to address these issues. Another method to bring the profession of arms back into focus for the Air Force is to further integrate fitness into the AF culture. Before addressing methods to integrate fitness, the benefits of fitness and the evolution of fitness in the military will first be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Notes

¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 5th ed. (1977), s.v. "Culture."

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⁴ IBID., 20-21

⁵ William Mitchell, *Winged Defense*. (1925; Reprint, NY: Dover Publications, 1988), 6.

⁶ Hosmer, Bradley C. "The Air Force Turns 50: Is It Ready For The Future?" Speech. The Heritage Foundation, 4 September, 1997, 5-7.

⁷ Builder, Carl H. *The Icarus Syndrome*. New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1996.

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⁸ Builder, Carl H. *The Icarus Syndrome*. New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1996, 35-36 .

⁹ Newton, Lloyd W. "The Air and Space Basic Course – An Airman's Perspective." Speech. Opening of ABC Course at Maxwell AFB, 6 July 1998, 1.

¹⁰ Builder, xv-xvi.

¹¹ Moskos, Charles C. *The Military: More than Just a Job?* Washington DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988, 15-17.

¹² IBID, 15-17.

¹³ Wood, Frank R, "At the Cutting Edge of Institutional and Occupational Trends: The US Air Force Officer Corps," in Charles Moskos and Frank R. Woods, eds, *The Military: More than Just a Job?* Washington DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988, 27.

¹⁴ Smith, James M (1998). "USAF Culture and Cohesion: Building and Air and Space Force for the 21st Century." INSS Occasional Paper 19, USAF Academy, CO, June 1998,32.

¹⁵ Callandar, Bruce D. "To Be An Airman." *Air Force Magazine*, vol 82 no 10, (October 1999): 50-53.

¹⁶ Air University. Aerospace Basic Course. On Line, 18 August 2000, 1.

¹⁷ Jordan, Bryant. "Getting the Big Picture." *Air Force Times* vol 59 no 4, August 31 1998: 12-14.

¹⁷ "Developing Aerospace Leaders Program." *Air Force Policy Letter Digest*, March 2000, 1-2.

¹⁸ IBID., 1-2

¹⁹ IBID, 1-2

²⁰ Solo, Mark S. "Our Image as Professional Air Force Airmen." *En Route News Commentary*. On line. 14 June 2000, 2.

Chapter 3

Benefits of a Fit Force

No man expects to live forever. But the man in perfect physical condition will live longer, especially in combat.

—General Hap Arnold

An army...whose physical power, like the muscles of an athlete, has been steeled by training in privation and effort—such an army is imbued with the true military spirit.

—Clausewitz

Study after study touts the benefits of fitness. Included among these many benefits is team building and unit cohesion. With our current cultural problems stemming from focus on the self versus focus on the team, the AF could possibly ameliorate some of these problems by implementing fitness programs that emphasize teamwork and unit camaraderie. The positive impact fitness has on both the individual and unit will be discussed below by first addressing the teambuilding benefits of fitness and next addressing the physical/psychological and financial benefits that a fit force brings to the fight.

Teambuilding

Benefits of fitness include teambuilding, unit cohesion, and esprit de corps – all of which are essential elements of the military culture. Since effective fitness programs can help foster teamwork, the two need to go hand in hand. Supporting this opinion is a study conducted by

the Federal Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training and Related Issues which stressed the important role that teambuilding and fitness play in the profession of arms. Conducted in June 1997, the committee was appointed by Secretary of Defense Cohen to determine how best to train our military forces so that they are disciplined, effective, and ready.

The principal objective of the military's training programs is to produce an effective, efficient, and ready force...through disciplined self-confident, physically fit, and technically competent graduates. Teamwork, mental and physical training is essential for achieving these objectives.¹

The committee's recommendations, which were also agreed upon by the AF Medical Operations Agency who spearheads the program, included "toughening physical fitness requirements and expanding instruction on nutrition and wellness."² The report cited that the services should "embrace fitness as a lifestyle discipline required for good health whether one flies, sails, or works at a computer."³

Emphasis on the military team dates back to the earliest days of military history but is best defined by Army Field Manual 22-102. Based on a World War II definition that is still applicable 50 years later, the opening paragraph captures the essence of the Army's basic unit, the combat-ready team.

A conglomerate mass of Americans gathered from all walks of life who had been shaped into a cohesive organization for the purpose of performing certain military tasks, the unit was not simply the place where members lived and worked, ate and slept; the unit was the soldier's family.⁴

Today, the team/unit/squadron are the foundations from which operations are conducted. Developing the team, thus becomes essential in mission accomplishment. Team development is comprised of three stages and during each of these stages, physical activity plays an important role in teambuilding and unit cohesion. During the formation stage, team leaders are encouraged to set the professional example for their soldiers to follow. Maintaining a high fitness standard, for example, supports the value of discipline and thus encourages self-discipline in all team

members. During the development stage, team members train as a unit and build pride through accomplishment. Running an obstacle course together may be an example. The final stage is sustainment in which soldiers focus on teamwork and training and build pride and spirit through sports and social activities.⁵ Sports programs encourage members to identify with “their” team and help develop unit cohesion and pride.

The AF should focus more on building teams to help overcome our cultural problems. A study by the Developing Aerospace Leaders Program indicated a strong perception from both the officer and enlisted side of the house on the emphasis of self over unit orientation.⁶ This individual versus team orientation is synonymous with the occupational versus institutional orientation defined earlier by Moskos. Both present problems to military organizations whose training programs are based on teamwork and unit cohesion. On unit cohesion, Clausewitz states:

An army that maintains its cohesion under the most murderous fire; that cannot be shaken by imaginary fears and resists well-founded ones with all its might...that is mindful of all these duties and qualities by virtue of the single powerful idea of the honor of its arms—such an army is imbued with the true military spirit.⁷

In addition to teambuilding, fitness offers many other benefits that will be discussed briefly below.

Physical and Psychological

Despite the technological advances of today’s military, physical challenges and labor intensive tasks remain that require a fit force. This coupled with high workloads as a result of an increased emphasis on the military instrument of power (IOP), further emphasize the need for a fit force.

High operational tempo/deployments are a key source of current military retention problems. Deployments are often accompanied by increased work days, decreased leisure time,

increased manual labor as a result of positioning equipment and supplies, and the increased burden of wearing weight intensive chemical gear for extended periods of time. Additionally, changes in time zone that affect the body's clock; changes in diet and increased mental stress from being away from family and friends, from an increased threatcon level, or from the fog of war, also pay a heavy toll on an individual's physical and psychological make-up.

Fitness studies show that participation in a regular fitness program helps individuals combat many of the above physical and psychological problems associated with military duty. It helps military members maintain a professional, physically fit outward appearance along with physiological systemic benefits. Fitness is also a force multiplier that enables military members to maintain positive mental health and well being by decreasing levels of anxiety, depression, fatigue and confusion.⁸ Fit military members therefore, positively contribute to the military team. On the other hand, an unfit military member who is unable to carry his/her own load, is a detriment to the team.

Financial

In addition to the increased emphasis of both the military IOP and technology, Lt General Hosmer states that the U.S. military will face an environment characterized by an absence of a major military threat, a continued effort to sustain the military in a peacetime environment, and a growing divergence between the national culture and the warrior culture.⁹ Historically, Americans have had a hard time supporting high defense budgets during inter-war periods. Now, with no perceivable major threat, there will be continued resistance to extensive defense budgets. All of these reasons point to an environment of ever-decreasing budgets including medical budgets.

In a 1999 ACSC research project entitled “The Air Force Fitness Program: Is It Adequate?,” the author, Major Gindhart, reports that large corporations have shown “reductions of as much as 36% in health care costs for those who exercise. Data suggests that a cost/benefit ratio of 1:1.5 to 1:1.8 can be realized from exercise programs.”¹⁰ Studies show that fitness programs can help reduce high blood pressure and cholesterol levels; reduce injury through conditioned and balanced muscle development; prevent osteoporosis; and decrease absenteeism. An investment in fitness therefore, becomes a wise financial investment all around and benefits the entire Air Force team.

In summary, fitness is an essential part of the military culture and can help the AF develop a team versus self-orientation – ie, an airman-first mentality. Fitness also brings physical, psychological, and financial benefits to the military community. In today’s environment of increased deployments and shrinking budgets, effective military fitness programs will become increasingly important. And in a society in which only 64 percent of adolescents and a mere 15 percent of adults engage in the recommended amount of physical activity,¹¹ military fitness programs will continue to be a key component in the development of an effective, efficient, and ready team. Despite the numerous benefits, the AF culture today has lost sight of the team. Perhaps fitness can help bring it back into focus.

Notes

¹ DefenseLink. *Report of the Federal Advisory Committee of Gender-Integrated Training and Related Issues to the Secretary of Defense*, 1997, 2.

² IBID., 17.

³ IBID., 17.

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⁵ IBID., 5-6

⁶ Link, Chuck Maj Gen (ret). “Developing Aerospace Leaders.” Lecture. Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 3 October 2000, 73.

⁷ Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, 187.

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⁸ Recchia, Susan M. “Teamwork and Training.” *Tips and Techniques*. On line. August 2000, 1-2.

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¹⁰ Nieman, David C, Sports Medicine Fitness Course (Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing, 1986), 252.

¹¹ Recchia, 1.

Chapter 4

Evolution of Military Fitness

The success and general efficiency of every military establishment is, in very large degree, dependent upon the physical fitness, endurance, and condition of the individual units of which it is composed.

—W. Nash

In 1940, close to 900,000 men were rejected for military service due to mental or physical defects of which ninety percent were preventable¹. The lack of fit recruits put the onus on the military to develop programs to ensure a physically fit, ready force.² Since then, fitness programs have evolved but have they evolved enough? Below I will review the history of the AF fitness program and then compare it to the other services to determine if the AF fitness program is in part, perpetuating our unique cultural problems.

History of AF Fitness

In 1945, the Army Air Corps developed the first “Air Force” fitness program that consisted of a scored test including sit-ups, pull-ups, and a 300-yard shuttle run. When the Air Force became a separate service in 1947, a new, yet vague program was developed. No specific guidance was mandated and as a result, later studies concluded that the overall status of the Air Force fitness program and its members was poor. A fitness-specific regulation, AF Regulation 50-25, was adopted in 1969 yet it too, remained vague with responsibility on the individual alone to maintain his fitness level.³

In 1972, AF Regulation 50-49 superceded AFR 50-25 and mandated a 1.5-mile timed run as the new fitness standard. The new standard, originated by Dr. Ken Cooper, correlated aerobic capacity with time and distance. With minor changes including a timed walk, faster run times, and inclusion in a new AF regulation, 35-11, the timed run test became the basis of the AF Fitness program for many years.

A 1980 DoD assessment of the AF Fitness Program, however, found the program not viable.

Physical Fitness is a vital component of combat readiness and is essential to the general health and well-being of armed forces personnel. Physical fitness training and activities should be designed to develop skills needed in combat, enhance cohesion in units, promote competitive spirit, develop positive attitudes towards exercise, and promote self-confidence and self-discipline. To achieve these ends, physical fitness programs must be carefully planned and supervised, follow the established principals of physical fitness training, and involve the participation of all personnel.⁴

Minor program changes were again made to include fitness improvement training, a weight management program, and a body-fat measurement in lieu of weight standard.

In 1989, the AF was tasked with developing a safe, scientific-based fitness test and the cycle ergometry test was selected. “The Air Force uses an annual submaximal cycle ergometry test to measure aerobic capacity (VO2 Max), which is a surrogate measure of an individual’s total fitness level. Cycle ergometry provides an estimate of an individual’s aerobic capacity by collecting the heart rate responses while exercising on a cycle ergometer at a sub-maximal resistance and controlled pace.”⁵

In July 2000, the Air Force entered into a one-year test phase for an expanded program by adding measures of muscular fitness, i.e., push-ups and crunches. The proposed measures will complement the current program that measures cardio-respiratory endurance. According to Major Jayne Stetto of the Health Promotions Office at the Air Force Medical Operations Center,

the goal of the new program is to “motivate all members to participate in a year-round physical conditioning program, emphasizing fitness.”⁶

Despite the many changes to the fitness program, the AF has not embraced fitness as part of its culture. It has not made fitness a mandatory part of the workweek and leadership has not emphasized its importance. The AF fitness culture revolves around passing the fitness test once a year vs. maintaining a high level of fitness throughout the year. Because fitness has not been fully integrated into the AF culture, the AF misses out on opportunities to build teams and unit camaraderie through fitness training. To develop airman first, we need to develop small units and teams first.

Service Fitness Comparison

DoD Directive 1308.1, Physical Fitness and Body Fat Program, the governing directive for fitness in the military, states that “physical fitness is essential to combat readiness and is an important part of the general health and well being for Armed Forces personnel.”⁷ The directive mandates that all DoD fitness programs encompass the five elements of fitness that include: cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility coupled with body composition. Programs should allow service members to maintain a general level of health, physical fitness, and body fat that result in their “effective performance of duty and appropriate military appearance.”⁸

Below, I will briefly discuss the fitness programs of the USMC, USN, and the USA.

USMC

Ask a person what comes to mind when they hear the term “Marine” and most will associate the term with an image of a fit, neat and trim military member. Marine Corps directives

promulgate this image. Marine Corps Orders 6100.3J and 6100.10B govern physical fitness programs in the USMC. “It is essential to the day-to-day effectiveness and combat readiness that every Marine maintains the established standards of health, fitness and appearance”⁹ regardless of age, grade, or duty assignment. To accomplish this, the USMC fitness program was developed based on the ultimate goal of success of Marines in combat. The program objectives are four-fold:

1. Contribute to the health and well-being of every Marine through regular exercise and health education
2. Develop Marines who are physically capable of performing their duties in garrison or combat
3. Develop in Marines a reserve level of physical fitness that will enhance their chances of winning in a combat situation
4. Provide a medium for developing self-confidence of the individual Marine and thereby enhance overall discipline, morale, esprit-de-corps, unit efficiency, and the desire to excel¹⁰

Past programs have focused on the bi-annual fitness test rather than the rigors of combat. The updated physical conditioning program emphasizes unit and combat fitness training and includes anaerobic conditioning, resistance training, and aerobic conditioning. Each Marine is required to participate in a minimum of 3 hours of fitness training per week and to obtain a minimum level of third class on their physical fitness test. The semi-annual test includes a 3-mile run, pull ups (flexed arm hang for women) and sit-ups. “Marines who are not physically fit are a detriment to the readiness and overall performance of the Marine Corps.”¹¹

Because the Marines train as teams and fight as teams, fitness has been fully ingrained as an essential component of the USMC culture. Many Marine units participate in organized group PT (physical training) as a mandatory part of the workweek. Group PT formations foster teamwork. Another way in which the USMC has incorporated fitness into its culture is by annotating fitness

scores on the annual (semi-annual for Lts) fitness reports. This shows the emphasis that USMC leadership places on fitness and the important role it plays in the Marine culture.

USA

Similar to the USMC fitness program, the Army's program stresses the direct correlation between fitness and combat readiness and underscores the important role fit soldiers have played on the battlefields throughout history. Army regulation 350-15 specifies that vigorous physical fitness training, which includes cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility training, be conducted 3-5 times per week.¹² The Army fitness test is conducted twice a year and includes a 2-mile run, push-ups, and sit-ups.

Group PT is also a mandatory part of many army unit's workweek. Similar to the USMC, Army units train as teams and fight as teams. Army fitness programs therefore, emphasize teamwork. Although the timed run is an individual effort, in many cases, it is conducted as a unit with members cheering each other on to completion. Teamwork is absolutely essential in the Army. During a 25 January 2001 lecture at ACSC, Lt General Hal Moore, author of "We Were Soldiers Once and Young" highlighted this point. With regards to American soldiers in Viet Nam, Lt General Moore stated "we didn't fight for the flag, we didn't fight for any presidential decree, or glory, we fought for each other."¹³ The implied emphasis on teamwork can not be understated. Lt General Moore also said, "stay in shape, don't get fat!"¹⁴ Although this may sound like an off the cuff remark, it drives home the point again that a fit force enhances combat effectiveness and is essential for mission accomplishment.

USN

The Navy's fitness program is also evolving. Message traffic explaining changes to Navy Instruction 6110.1E quotes the Chief of Naval Operations as saying "we want to establish a

Navy-wide culture of fitness that will promote physical conditioning and commitment to a healthy lifestyle”¹⁵ versus simply passing the semi-annual physical readiness test. The instruction highlights the link between fitness and mission performance. The test includes push-ups, curl-ups, and a 1.5 mile run or 500-yard/450-meter swim. The Navy’s fitness culture is the most similar to the AF’s culture in that fitness is not emphasized as much as it is in the Army and the Marines.

Like the other services, the Air Force fitness program is also evolving. However, more improvements are needed to emphasize fitness as a foundation of the profession of arms versus fitness as a once a year test that needs to be passed. “No matter how accurate a once a year evaluation of aerobic conditioning is, it is still a once a year evaluation of one area of physical fitness.”¹⁶ The AF may miss out on the fitness benefits of teamwork, esprit de corps, and unit cohesion if it concentrates on the current individualized cycle ergometer test alone. The following chapter will discuss methods to enhance fitness in the AF and by doing so, enhance teambuilding which in turn, will help alleviate current cultural problems.

Notes

¹ Schellous R. *Air Force Physical Fitness: An Assessment of Characteristics and Programs Which Affect Individual Physical Fitness*. (AFIT, 1982), 9.

² Strong, Gordon R. “*The Fitness Factor*.” *Air Chronicles*. On line. 11 November 00, 1-3.

³ Gindhart, Richard T. “The Air Force Physical Fitness Program, Is It Adequate?” Research Report no 062. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1999, 14-15.

⁴ Strong, 1-3.

⁵ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 40-501. *The Air Force Fitness Program*. October 1998, 30.

⁶ Bailey, Anita. “Air Force Adding Strength, Flexibility Tests to Fitness Test.” *Air Force News*. On line. December 1998, 1.

⁷ Department of Defense Directive 1308.1. *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Program*, July 1995, 1.

⁸ IBID., 1

⁹ Marine Corps Order (MCO) 6100.10B. Weight Control and Military Appearance, March 1993, 1.

¹⁰ Marine Corps Order (MCO) 6100.3J. Physical Fitness, February 1988, 1-4.

¹¹ IBID, 1.

Notes

¹² Army Field Manual 21-20. *Physical Fitness*. On-line, 12-17

¹³ Moore, Hal Lt Gen (ret). “We Were Soldiers Once and Young.” Lecture. Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 25 Jan 2001.

¹⁴ IBID.

¹⁵ Naval Instruction (OPNAVINST) 6110.1E. *Physical Readiness Program*. May 2000, 1-2.

¹⁶ Strong, 1-3.

Chapter 5

Can Fitness Help Build Airman First?

The first wealth is health.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

In his speech to the Heritage Foundation, Lt General Hosmer states that “the Air Force should pull out all the stops to build strong, tight units at the squadron and wing level. Strong units stimulate the right kind of loyalties...and establish unit cohesion.”¹ Fitness can help build strong, tight units! Below I will address several ways in which fitness can be incorporated as a building block within the AF culture.

Suggestions for Incorporating Fitness into the AF Culture

Military members tend to view themselves as hard-charging, Type A, competitive individuals. The current AF pass/fail test, however, does not stimulate or motivate airman to improve or to perform to their optimal level. The first step in adopting a culture of fitness therefore, is to change the annual pass/fail test to a scored test similar to the other services. The current AF test provides members with a score such as “Your VO2 Max score of 41 exceeds AF aerobic standards...and means you are more fit than 90% of the people in your age and gender.” This score is an estimation of the actual amount of oxygen (aerobic capacity) consumed during exercise. Although this score has been recognized by the exercise physiology community and professional fitness organizations as a primary indicator of cardiorespiratory endurance, the

passing standards were initially established around the 10th percentile which does not indicate that a person is aerobically fit. The initial rationale behind this standard was to reduce health risks by increasing fitness levels; it was not designed to make military members perform to a high level of aerobic fitness.

The complexity of the AF scoring system hinders our ability to understand what the score we receive actually means. To reduce the confusion, the AF fitness test scoring system should be similar to the other services. The proposed program would have a total number of points available such as 100 points. Each component of the test, i.e., cardiovascular, muscular endurance and muscular strength would be assigned a percentage of those points. For example, the cardiovascular test instrument may be worth 50 points and the muscular endurance and strength instruments worth 25 points apiece. To get the maximum number of points per category, a set number of repetitions, etc would be established. A minimum number would also be determined for passing purposes. A scored test such as the one above gives individuals a starting reference point for improvement while simultaneously, taking some of the vagueness out of the current scoring system. A scored test also promotes healthy competition, which is an essential element of teambuilding and unit cohesion. Developing strong unit cohesion can help overcome the AF's "individual vs. the team" mentality which is at the core of its cultural problems.

The second step in adopting a fitness culture is to have AF leadership lead the charge. In his article entitled "Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder Than Words," Lt General Stroup states that in order to embed changes to an organization's culture, leaders must pay attention to, measure, and control those actions.² Building on the scored test concept above, fitness scores should be recorded on AF Officer Performance Reports (OPRs) and Enlisted

Performance Reports (EPRs). OPRs and EPRs are assessment tools that leadership pays attention to. Adding fitness scores to these reports like the Marines do will help change the fitness mindset of the AF from the top down. Fitness recognition by commanders via medals, certificates, ribbons, passes, or speeches in front of subordinates, for the outstanding fitness unit or most-improved fitness score, etc. would further emphasize its importance. Being recognized will encourage both individuals and units to work together as a team to improve their fitness.

Third, although the fitness test is only a measurement of fitness and does not define a person's overall fitness level, it should be conducted more than once a year. All of the other services do a semiannual test. At a minimum, the AF needs to increase the frequency of their test to semiannually. The test itself should also change; two distinct "tests" should be conducted annually.

Since the AF has invested significant resources in training personnel and in buying cycle ergometers, I recommend that we keep the ergometry test as *part* of the first "test." It can be incorporated into the Microfit Fitness Profile that many AF fitness, health and wellness centers currently employ. The Microfit Fitness Profile is comprised of seven measurements: systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, resting heart rate, percent fat, back flexibility, biceps strength, and aerobic fitness. It also includes a total fitness score. The aerobic part of Microfit Profile is conducted on a cycle ergometer; little equipment is required to conduct the other measurements so the financial investment would be minimal.

Additionally, the results are graphically depicted by category using a scale of poor, unfit, fair, fit and excellent. The assessment allows individuals to easily determine what aspects of their personal fitness need improvement. Since Microfit measures flexibility, muscle strength, aerobic conditioning and body fat, it covers the same fitness components that our new fitness test

incorporates. The Microfit Fitness Profile should be conducted six months prior to the actual scored test, once a year, and should be used as an assessment of fitness rather than as the scored test. The Microfit Assessment can be used in a similar fashion as performance feedback is used. It is a mandatory process and gives the individual an opportunity to make improvements prior to their performance report or fitness test in this case.

Our current ergometry test is an individualized effort that focuses on individualized training. By adding the other components associated with the Microfit test, members will be encouraged to train together to enhance their proficiency. Training together should be inherent in day to day military operations; the Microfit test gives AF members the opportunity to train together because it emphasizes muscular strength as well as aerobic conditioning.

The second test should be conducted once a year and should be consistent with the other services – i.e., run, sit-ups, push-ups. Implementing the Army's test, which includes a 2 mile-run and maximum sit-ups/pushups in 2 minutes, would be easy to do and would not cost anything in terms of equipment or additional manpower. The score of this test should be documented on annual OPRs and EPRs. The key to both of these "tests" is to ingrain teamwork via year round fitness training into the minds of our young airmen and lieutenants from day one in their Air Force careers.

Additionally, the Air Force needs to adopt unit fitness as a mandatory part of the workweek like the Army and Marines have done. A successful fitness program should encompass proven fitness-industry concepts such as those adopted by the Army's "FITT" model - frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type.³ The frequency should be a minimum of three times per week. The intensity should be strenuous enough to elevate the heart rate to 60-90 percent of the heart rate reserve. For muscle endurance and strength, intensity will vary according to number of

repetitions. Time should be a minimum of 20-30 minutes for cardio workouts and will vary for muscular strength training according to the number of repetitions. The type of exercise will vary according to what fitness component is being worked – i.e., running will improve cardiovascular performance and weight training will develop muscular strength. Warm-ups and cool-downs are also essential components of an effective fitness program.⁴

Incorporating fitness as a mandatory part of the workweek has countless benefits, many of which were discussed in Chapter 4. In particular though are teamwork benefits. The AF's emphasis on fitness as an individual responsibility coupled with a fitness test that is conducted one-on-one with a fitness monitor does not build or foster teamwork. Mandatory unit fitness training coupled with a timed run fitness test on the other hand encourages teamwork, camaraderie, and unit cohesion. Since much effort has been put into combating stovepiping and careerism problems within the Air Force, fitness appears to be a simple part of a solution that puts the emphasis back on the team vs. the self while developing airman first.

Finally, the Air Force owes the taxpayers of the United States a fit force. Recent prime time coverage on CNN and another article in Reuters highlighted how “unfit” military members really are. The news report states how some three to five thousand service members are kicked out of the service annually for being overweight.⁵ The opening paragraph of an American Journal of Health Promotion article entitled “Members of the Military Need More Exercise” stated:

If you think people in the armed services are healthier and fitter than the rest of us, think again. Newly-released survey results suggest that the majority of service members are above national standards for weight in proportion to height, and more than half of service members exercise less than three times a week, or not at all. In a culture that values physical fitness, it is surprising to find rates of inactivity similar to those of civilians.⁶

The article went on to state that the level of fitness varied according to the service. It is of no surprise that the AF was the lowest of all the services in terms of members who exercised at

least three times per week (only 50% versus 85% for the USMC). Additionally, the article stated that only 10% of AF members had mandatory physical training.⁷

If nothing else, these articles should embarrass the AF. We're a part of the profession or arms; a profession in which fit military members are essential to defending our great country. In our efforts to develop "Airman First," we should make sure fitness plays a primary role. The benefits to both the individual and to the team are too numerous to dismiss with a once a year cycle ergometry test.

Notes

¹ Hosmer, Bradley C. "The Air Force Turns 50: Is It Ready For The Future?" Speech. The Heritage Foundation, 4 September, 1997, 5-7.

² Stroup, Theodore. "Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder Than Words." *Military Review*, Jan-Feb, 1996, 69-73.

³ Army Field Manual 21-20. *Physical Fitness*, 6-8.

⁴ IBID., 6-8.

⁵ Cohen Elizabeth. "Programs Hope to Battle Military Obesity, Retain Troops." *CNN*. On-line, January 5, 2001, 1-2.

⁶ "Members of the Military Need More Exercise." *Reuters Health*. On-line, January 3, 2001, 1-2.

⁷ IBID., 1-2.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity. The relationship between the soundness of the body and the activities of the mind is subtle and complex. Much is not yet understood. But we do know what the Greeks knew: that intelligence and skill can only function at the peak of their capacity when the body is healthy and strong; that hardy spirits and tough minds usually inhabit sound bodies.

—JFK

During the past few years, the AF has developed positive initiatives such as the Airman Basic Course and Developing Aerospace Leaders program to deal with some of the problems inherent within the AF culture today. Defining and reinforcing our core values has also aided in this endeavor. This “back to the basics” approach should also be taken with regards to the fitness culture of the AF. Small changes in our fitness programs such as those addressed in Chapter 5 could reap large benefits for the AF. Changing the format, frequency, and scoring of the annual AF fitness test is a start. Making fitness a mandatory and integral part of the workweek as other services have done is another step in the right direction. Above all, leadership involvement, i.e., credibility via example, emphasis, and recognition are key in making the necessary program changes.

Fitness has always been a foundation of the military culture and the profession of arms. Other than time away from the duty day, there are no evident cons to having a fit force and the

benefits are numerous. The AF should build on the pillar of fitness and capitalize on the wealth of opportunities a fit force brings to the fight.

Glossary □

ACSC	Air Command and Staff College
AU	Air University
DOD	Department of Defense
USAF	United States Air Force
USA	United States Army
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy

anaerobic exercise. Exercises that can maintain or improve the efficiency of the anaerobic (without oxygen) energy-producing systems and can increase muscular fitness and tolerance for acid-based imbalances during high intensity effort. Exercises that require a near-maximal to maximal levels of energy production, are stop-start in nature, and require a high level of intensity for short periods of time.

body composition: The body's chemical composition. Division of body into chemical or anatomical components. Common two-component model divides the body into fat mass and fat-free mass. Fat mass often discussed in terms of relative body fat which is the percentage of total body mass that is composed of fat. Fat-free mass simply refers to all body tissue that is not fat.

body fat. The body is composed of fat, fat-free mass (muscle, bone, essential organ tissue) and body water. Body fat is expressed as a percentage of total body weight.

cardio-respiratory. The ability of the whole body to sustain prolonged, rhythmical exercise.

flexibility. The functional capacity of a joint to move through a normal range of motion.

muscular endurance. The ability of a skeletal muscle or group of muscles to perform repeated contractions for an extended period of time.

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